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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC 05013-87/1  
10 December 1987

MEMORANDUM FOR: See Distribution

FROM:

Assistant National Intelligence Officer for NESA

SUBJECT: Warning and Forecast Report for Near East and South Asia

1. Attached is my report to the Director for the November warning meeting. The next meeting will be Thursday, 17 December at 1015 hours in Room 7E62, CIA Headquarters. Our first discussion from 1020 to 1100 hours will focus on Israel-Syria-Lebanon. Syria's involvement in support of the successful hang glider attack in Israel proper raises the possibility of a spiral of retaliatory incidents. What might Israel do (if they haven't already taken action by the time of the meeting) and what are the ramifications? Does this incident reflect a belief by Assad that (in the wake of the Amman summit) he must reinvigorate the armed struggle with Israel to compete (in the Arab world) with the Iranian threat? Or did the PFLP-GC simply exceed everyone's expectations of what it could do with such an attack? Finally, what's happening in southern Lebanon generally (PLO reinfiltration, PLO-Hizballah relations, etc.)? What are the implications?

2. Our second topic from 1100 to 1130, is Bangladesh (a first, as far as anyone here can remember). What are Ershad's prospects? What are the alternatives to Ershad and under what circumstances could he be replaced? What is the significance of the potential scenarios for US interests?

3. Please have your clearances passed and call [ ] the NIO/NESA office [ ] with names of the attendees by NOON, 16 December 1987.

Attachment:  
As stated~~SECRET~~

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10 December 1987

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

VIA: National Intelligence Officer for Warning

FROM: [REDACTED] 25X1  
Assistant National Intelligence Officer for NESA

SUBJECT: NESA Warning and Forecast Report, 19 November 1987

The Persian Gulf

Another Offensive? CIA/NESA led the discussion with a review of the evidence associated with preparations for an Iranian offensive. In CIA's view, there is sufficient evidence to support their conclusion in the October meeting that Iran is making preparations to support an offensive, which could occur as early as January of next year. Some of the specific indications include large mobilization rallies, unusual training of armored forces, a call for an offensive by members of Iran's political leadership, the erection of new tent camps, and military construction. CIA believes the most likely area for an offensive is the southern front region--from Dezful south to Al Faw. This comment led to a discussion about the possibility of a move against Umm Qasr. There was general agreement that this was certainly one potential target and one in which both Iranian political and military objectives would be served. [REDACTED] 25X1

Use of Chemicals. Addressing the next topic on the agenda, the CIA analyst noted that if there is another large offensive next year we could see the use of chemicals by both sides. Iraq has used chemicals to blunt Iranian attacks and Iraqi counterattacks. Iran has acquired its own chemical stockpile, a capability it may decide to demonstrate to deter large scale Iraqi use of chemicals. [REDACTED] 25X1

In addition to use as a deterrent, Iran could use chemicals in conjunction with conventional attacks to break the coherence of Iraqi defenses in a critical area. A discussion of this possibility followed, with some disagreement over the utility of this option for Iran. On the one hand, if Iran used a persistent agent (like mustard) against frontline Iraqi troops, it would create problems for its own units engaged in the attack.

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Iran could, however, use chemicals against Iraqi headquarters and reenforcing units to disrupt command and control and isolate Iraqi units under attack. The general consensus of the group seemed to be that if Iraqi forces were generally surprised--beyond the use of chemical weapons--Iranian chemical weapons could be a significant reenforcing factor. Otherwise, the use of chemicals by either Iran or Iraq would probably play a contributory, but not decisive, role in the outcome of any battle. [REDACTED]

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What Next in the Gulf? CIA's senior political analyst for Iran presented his views on the most likely next steps for Iran in the Gulf. Iran's basic motivations in the Gulf remain unchanged: (1) keeping pressure on the Gulf States supporting Iraq and (2) demonstrating its opposition to the US presence in the region. Although the Iranians are not intimidated, they have been sobered by several developments: the European resolve demonstrated by the deployment of European naval forces to the Gulf region, the uncharacteristic resolve and unity of the Arabs on the issue, and the embarrassment and failure of Iranian forces in their direct encounters with the US in the Gulf. [REDACTED]

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CIA believes Iran probably will continue avoiding direct attacks on US forces in the region. Rather, it will pursue the same general tactics with the focus on pressuring Arab supporters of Iraq and demonstrating resolve but avoiding a provocation that forces a major escalation by the United States. Under this view, we could expect a continuation of activities like mining, sabotage against Arab oil facilities, and Silkworm attacks against Kuwaiti ships or facilities. If, however, the proximity of US and Iranian forces in the Gulf results in another embarrassing incident for Iran, especially one producing significant Iranian casualties, Iranian restraint could "go up in smoke" with the political necessity for a direct response outweighing the desire to avoid a broader confrontation with the United States. [REDACTED]

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Diplomatic Developments. There was general agreement that Iranian diplomatic activities do not demonstrate genuine flexibility. The Community believes Iran is stalling by showing occasional "reasonableness" while simultaneously maintaining pressure on Iraq and its Arab supporters.

Warning Issues. Over the last several months, Iran has met with little success in advancing its fundamental objectives. Its policies to intimidate and divide the Arabs have had, if anything, the opposite effect. The United States continues to escort Kuwaiti ships and maintains its augmented naval presence, with little domestic or international pressure on it to stop. While the Iranians have had a reasonably good year economically, more recently they have been forced to discount their oil exports and they are having trouble finding buyers to maintain export volumes. While much of this is good news and may gradually lead Iran to adjust its goals, it raises a warning issue. Will these frustrations lead Iran to conclude that it must make obvious progress in the ground war to offset these setbacks? Its preparations to date mean that it is, at minimum, keeping that option open. [REDACTED]

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Afghanistan

The Military Situation. [ ] DIA began the discussion of Afghanistan with a review of the military situation during this year's fighting season. [ ] pointed to three discernible trends.

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- There has been a shift of emphasis in Soviet operations from military to political objectives.
- Soviet forces are shouldering an even greater part of the war effort.
- The effectiveness of Soviet close air support has decreased. [ ]

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An assertion of a shift in emphasis from military to political issues does not imply that the military situation was not as intense this year. In fact, it was a busy year militarily for both regime and Soviet forces. However, military operations and forces have been used more frequently for what are clearly political ends. For example, the Soviet military focused considerable resources in trying to make the regime's reconciliation scheme work, the Soviet commander in Afghanistan has spent an unusual amount of time on other (non-military) issues, there has been a more concerted effort to establish the declared peace zone in the Qandahar area and there have been several crude attempts to use military activities to demonstrate a success in the regime's political activities. [ ]

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On the subject of air support, [ ] indicated that whatever we eventually conclude about total Soviet air losses, there was no doubt that Soviet operations had been adversely affected by the increasing effectiveness of Mujahideen anti-air weapons. This change is demonstrated by altered Soviet tactics, the increasing security of Mujahideen caravans and the difficulty the Soviets have had in protecting their own convoys.

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Political Developments. Politically, the Soviets and the Afghan regime have had a very bad year, with several high profile attempts to demonstrate progress--national reconciliation, Party Conference, etc.--leading to naught. [ ]

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A Soviet analyst gave his assessment of the view from Moscow. Moscow probably is not optimistic about the situation but does not believe it is losing control of the situation. The Soviets are now sending mixed signals on their willingness to consider new initiatives, including numerous hints about the possibility of a substantial pull-out of Soviet troops. This precipitated a general discussion of whether the Soviets have made a significant fundamental shift in their position. (Note: There was obvious range of opinion on this topic. Since it primarily involves judgments about the Soviet Union, this discussion led NIO/USSR to convene a special warning meeting on the Soviet position. See his report of that meeting for a more detailed examination of this issue.) Opinions on this topic ranged from the

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group of analysts who believe that the Soviets have not come to the point where they can accept less than a Communist-dominated government to the group at the other end of the spectrum that believe the Soviets have already decided to get out and are now concentrating on modalities. [REDACTED]

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NIO/NESA Comment: Although a spectrum of judgments has always existed on this issue, the shift in the spectrum is striking. No more than a year ago, the two spectrums ranged from "they'll never get out" to "maybe--eventually--they could be convinced. Even those who believe the Soviets have not decided they can accept less than a Communist--dominated regime, now believe it is an evolving position.

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